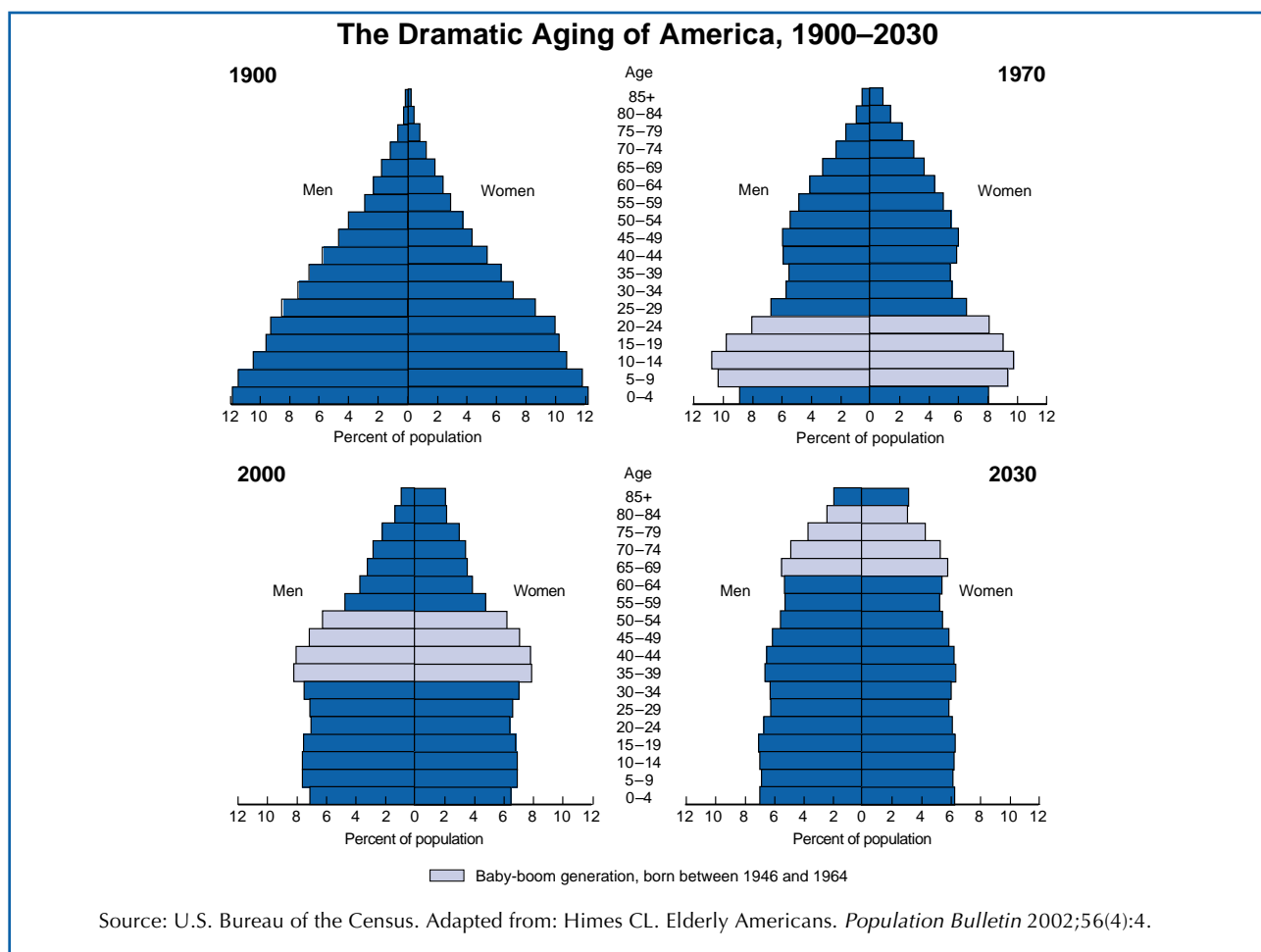


Healthy Aging:

Preventing Disease and Improving Quality of Life Among Older Americans

2003



“In 2011, the first wave of America’s 76 million baby boomers will turn 65 and trigger dramatic shifts in all aspects of American life. Our vision for the future is framed by productive, active engagement and high quality of life throughout the lifespan. Key to the achievement of that vision must be a substantially enhanced focus on preventing disease, promoting health, and preserving independence and quality of life among older Americans.”

William D. Novelli
Executive Director and CEO
AARP

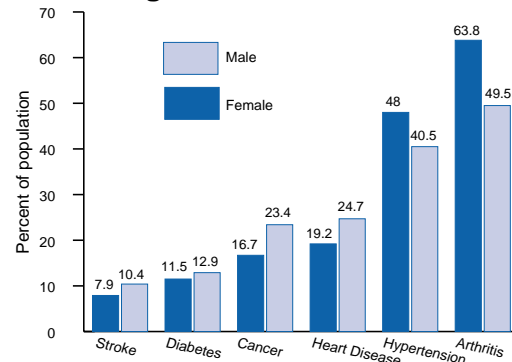
The Health and Economic Effects of an Aging Society

One hundred years ago, only a small percentage of people in this country were over the age of 65. That is rapidly changing. The number of Americans aged 65 and older is expected to double to 70 million over the next 30 years, as baby boomers age. They will be even more racially and ethnically diverse than today's seniors.

The aging of America will trigger a huge demand for health care and social services. Health care expenditures for a 65-year-old are now four times those for a 40-year-old. Seniors account for one-third of health care dollars spent in the United States, or over \$300 billion each year. Because the population will be older and greater in number, U.S. health care expenditures are projected to increase 25% by 2030.

Currently, at least 80% of seniors have at least one chronic condition, and 50% have at least two. These conditions can cause years of pain, disability, and loss of function. About 12 million seniors living at home report that chronic conditions limit their activities. Three million older adults say they cannot perform basic activities of daily living, such as bathing, shopping, dressing, or eating. Their quality of life suffers as a result, and demands on family and caregivers can be challenging.

Selected Chronic Conditions Affecting U.S. Adults 70 and Older



Source: CDC, National Center for Health Statistics. *Supplement on Aging Study and Second Supplement on Aging Study, 1995.*

Preventing health problems is one of the few known ways, if not the only way, we can stem rising health care costs. By preventing disease and injury, we also can help seniors remain independent for as long as possible, which can improve their quality of life and delay costly nursing home use. Recent trends are encouraging: in the last two decades, rates of nursing home use have declined, and nursing homes have an estimated 900,000 fewer residents today than would be expected if rates of use had remained steady.

Opportunities To Improve Older Americans' Health and Quality of Life

Poor health is *not* an inevitable consequence of aging. The following strategies have proven effective in promoting the health of older adults:

- **Healthy lifestyles.** Research has shown that healthy lifestyles are more influential than genetic factors in helping older people avoid the deterioration traditionally associated with aging. People who are physically active, eat a healthy diet, do not use tobacco, and practice other healthy behaviors reduce their risk for chronic diseases and have half the rate of disability of those who do not.
- **Early detection of diseases.** Screening for the early detection of chronic diseases and appropriate follow-up can save many lives; however, many older adults have not had recommended screenings. For example, 50% of Americans over age 65 have not had the recommended test for colorectal cancer, even though Medicare covers the cost.
- **Immunizations.** More than 50,000 people aged 65 or older die each year of influenza. Immunizations reduce a person's risk for hospitalization and death from this disease. Yet in 2000, 34% of persons aged 65 or older had not had a recent flu shot.
- **Injury prevention.** Falls are the most common cause of injuries to older adults. Half of older adults hospitalized for hip fractures cannot return home or live independently afterwards, and one quarter die within the first year after the fracture. Removing tripping hazards in the home and installing grab bars are simple measures that can greatly reduce older Americans' risk for falls and fractures.
- **Self-management techniques.** Programs to teach older Americans self-management techniques can reduce both the pain and costs of chronic disease. For example, the Arthritis Self-Help Course has been shown to reduce arthritis pain by 20% and visits to physicians by 40%. Unfortunately, fewer than 1% of Americans with arthritis participate in such programs, and courses are not available in many areas.

CDC's Roles in Promoting Healthy Aging

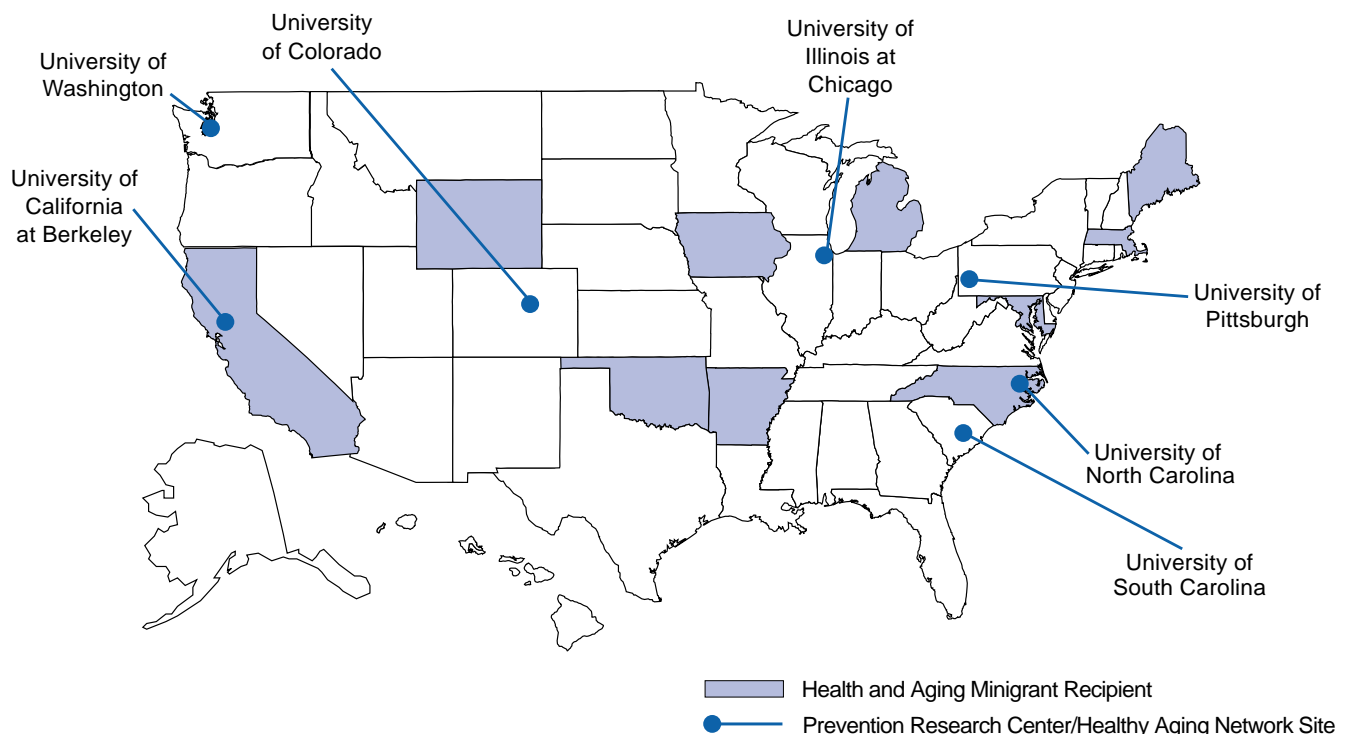
CDC promotes the health of older Americans in five ways:

1. *Providing high-quality health information and resources to public health professionals, consumers, health care providers, and aging experts.* Finding reliable, high-quality information on the health of seniors can be difficult. CDC has the scientific integrity and experience to provide information appropriate for diverse groups of older adults. CDC provides policy makers, health and aging organizations, the media, and consumers with science-based health information through such avenues as the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, conferences, training sessions, and Web sites. CDC recently updated its Healthy Aging Web site (www.cdc.gov/aging), which provides timely, practical information to health and aging professionals as well as the public. CDC also works with the American Society on Aging to provide journalists across the country with background materials on issues such as why older adults need regular physical activity, how they can lower their risk for West Nile virus, and how flu and pneumococcal vaccinations could save their lives.

2. *Supporting health care providers and organizations in their prevention efforts.* Medicare pays for many preventive services, yet fewer than 1 in 10 adults aged 65 or older has received all recommended screenings and immunizations. In a few areas of the country, programs are trying creative approaches to help health care providers reach more seniors.

One such program is the Sickness Prevention Achieved through Regional Collaboration (SPARC) project. Partially funded by CDC, this program operates in selected counties of New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. In two counties, SPARC doubled the annual rate of pneumococcal shots during a single flu season and developed a model method for redistributing the flu vaccine in seasons when the supply is short, thus assuring broader access for at-risk populations. SPARC provides no direct services; rather, it coordinates and strengthens the efforts of local health providers and organizations. CDC hopes to extend the reach of successful programs such as SPARC to benefit seniors nationwide.

Selected CDC-Supported Healthy Aging Programs



3. *Integrating public health prevention expertise with the Administration on Aging's aging services network.* As described in the Older American's Act, CDC has an advisory role to the aging network, which reaches seniors where they live and congregate in virtually every U.S. community. To ensure we take full advantage of health opportunities for older adults, CDC strives to bring together the scientific, monitoring, and programmatic expertise of public health with the experience and reach of the aging network. For instance, CDC and the Administration on Aging worked together on the Aging States Project, which identified aging issues important to state units on aging and state health departments. The project staff found that all states could benefit from additional resources and more opportunities to collaborate. In response, CDC and its partners awarded minigrants to 10 states, allowing the aging units and health departments to work together on health promotion activities for older adults.
4. *Identifying and putting into practice what works in prevention.* Research tells us that if seniors maintain just three healthy habits—moderate physical activity, good nutrition, and no smoking—they can delay disability by as much as 10 years. The benefits of such research, however, will never be realized unless we convert this knowledge into practical programs in our communities. CDC funds many programs that are helping communities reap the benefits of prevention research. For example, seven of the CDC's Prevention Research Centers formed a Healthy Aging Network, which is evaluating physical activity programs for older adults to identify which programs are the most effective.
5. *Monitoring changes in the health of older Americans.* CDC is the lead national agency responsible for collecting data and monitoring changes over time in the health of older Americans. This information helps to strengthen disease, disability, and injury prevention efforts. Such data also are needed to

Myth: *It's too late to change the health habits of older people.*

Reality: *Modest strength-building activities can increase muscle and bone strength even for people over age 90.*

identify health disparities affecting older adults and to create culturally appropriate, targeted interventions. With support from the National Institute on Aging, CDC's National Center for Health Statistics has created the Data Warehouse on Trends in Health and Aging on the Internet. Other databases, such as the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) and the Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS), also provide useful information on health trends among older Americans.

Future Directions

The first wave of baby boomers, those born in 1946, will reach age 65 in the year 2011. As the United States faces the challenge of responding to the health and social service needs of so many older Americans, CDC will work hard to ensure that

- *Added years are quality years.* Our goal is for older people to maintain their independence, good health, and engagement in life for as long as possible.
- *Current myths about aging are dispelled.* The public must understand that getting older does not have to mean inevitable decline and deterioration. People of any age can improve their health if they have a healthy lifestyle.
- *Aging issues are seen as public health issues, and the value of prevention is realized.* An enhanced focus on prevention is critical to preserving independence and reducing long-term care needs among seniors and is one the few ways to stem escalating health care costs.

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